

Twilight of Empire: a Narrative

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grating the new historical themes, and Foley does indeed discuss many often neglected groups and issues.

Thus, Foley has written a first-rate treatment of the subject. His book sheds new—and sophisticated—light on the colonial and territorial periods, and he suggests the richness of the prestatehood era for other scholars. In short, William E. Foley has produced a worthy successor to Louis Houck's classic work on early Missouri. Broad in scope, well written, and carefully researched, this book will be a standard source for both historians of the Midwest and general readers.

Twilight of Empire: A Narrative, by Allan W. Eckert. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1988. xiii, 587 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY R. DAVID EDMUNDS, INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Allan Eckert, the author of numerous historical chronicles of the conflicts between Indians and whites in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (The Winning of America series) has written an account of the events culminating in the Black Hawk War. As in the other volumes of the series, Eckert assures his readers that *Twilight of Empire* "is fact, not fiction," for "the incidents described here actually occurred; the dates are historically accurate; the characters . . . actually lived the roles in which they are portrayed" (xi). Herein lies the problem with this volume and with the other books in the series. Although Eckert's narratives do incorporate many primary materials, and although his descriptions of time and place do sometimes provide valuable insights into people and events during the past two centuries, his work does not represent serious historical scholarship. Instead, what emerges is an account of historical figures and events admittedly based on selected historical documentation, but much embellished by the author's personal interpretations and his liberal insertion of unsubstantiated and often entirely speculative conversations and anecdotes. These narratives may not be entirely fictitious, but they certainly are not history.

Such an assessment does not mean that Eckert's interpretations are always incorrect. Indeed, *Twilight of Empire* does reflect Eckert's considerable familiarity with the conflicting accounts of the Black Hawk War; and his penchant for details and for the inclusion and development of rather minor characters illustrates his research of his topic. Most modern historians of the Native American experience would agree with his depiction of Black Hawk as a patriot, but also as

an aging, embittered Sauk traditionalist who was jealous of Keokuk's rise to power. Eckert accurately portrays Black Hawk as a man tied to the past who stubbornly refuses to accept the inevitability of Sauk and Mesquakie removal. Moreover, Eckert also illustrates that the Sauk patriarch was rather readily duped by Wabokieshiek, the Winnebago Prophet, and by Neapope, a lifelong friend, whose assurances of intertribal support were much exaggerated.

Eckert also accurately portrays the considerable panic engendered by Black Hawk's return to Illinois. Envisioning the Sauk and Mesquakie recrossing of the Mississippi as the precursor to a general Indian uprising, settlers throughout Illinois and Wisconsin hurried to fortified posts or enlisted in local militia units. Marching north toward the Rock River valley, the loosely organized and poorly led Illinois militia blundered into a small party of Black Hawk's followers who were attempting to surrender. In their eagerness to attack the Indians, the militiamen precipitated the debacle at Stillman's Run which ended in a tragicomic American disaster. Eager for revenge, the militia, joined by units of the regular army, pursued Black Hawk and his followers north into Wisconsin while the hapless Sauks and Mesquakie attempted to escape back across the Mississippi into Iowa. Eckert's description of the Indians' suffering during their retreat across southern Wisconsin is especially poignant, as is his description of the slaughter near the mouth of the Bad Axe on August 2, 1832. Eckert's narrative vividly imparts the senseless drama of these events and illustrates that the Black Hawk War produced few, and only tragic heroes.

Although most professional historians will discount *Twilight of Empire*, the volume will appeal to many history buffs. Eckert writes well, and his other narratives have attracted a broad audience. Indeed, from a professional historian's perspective, the value of *Twilight of Empire* and Eckert's other volumes is their ability to cultivate an interest in the history of Indian-white military conflicts among a significant number of readers. One hopes that, after reading Eckert's narratives, some of these readers will want to explore other facets of the Native American experience.

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